

## Honda Introduces Bill to Safeguard Voting Rights

Written by Mike Honda

Wednesday, 14 November 2007 19:00

---

That could change thanks to legislation introduced recently by Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), which would eliminate overseas voting barriers such as a requirement that voters notarize the envelope with their ballot. The Overseas Voting Education and Reform, Safeguarding Every American's (OVERSEAS) Vote Act (H.R. 4173) would also expand significantly education and outreach to the 6 million or so Americans living outside the United States.

"Voting is a sacred right that should be made available to all our fellow citizens," said Honda, who is a member of the Americans Abroad Caucus. "If there isn't adequate infrastructure to outreach and educate overseas citizens, let's build one. If people don't know their rights, or get lost in this complicated process, let's help them."

A recent report on voter participation by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) uncovered some concerning figures for overseas voters.

- Less than 16.5 percent of the estimated 6 million requested a ballot for the 2006 election
- Over 70 percent of those ballots were returned to local elections offices undelivered
- Only 5.5 percent of the 6 million eligible to vote actually cast a ballot
- 23 percent of military and overseas ballots were not counted due to delays

The bill would protect the right to vote of Americans overseas, both military and civilian, by simplifying the voter registration and voting processes; by significantly expanding voter education and outreach initiatives; and would not allow states to deny citizens who were born abroad the right to vote just because they never resided in the United States.

The bill has been welcomed by overseas voting organizations such as the Geneva-based American Citizens Abroad (ACA) and the Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF), an organization with offices in Hamburg, Germany and Arlington, VA.

"The American Citizens Abroad, a global association of overseas citizens is delighted to see the OVERSEAS Vote Act introduced, and hopes for its rapid passage," said Dorothy van Schooneveld, ACA executive committee member. "This bill offers a response to major problems related to voting from abroad. ACA further applauds its innovative approach to ensuring outreach and education of overseas voters."

Ray Martinez, OVF's chair, agrees that legislation of this type is sorely needed.

"We appreciate the practical approach of this bill and the fact that it tackles persistent issues that have plagued the overseas voting process," said Martinez, also a former commissioner and vice chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). "We welcome its innovation and creativity. It is quite inspiring in its support of partnerships and outreach."